

REMARKS: “Bring Memory Back” Awards

Ceremony, June 13, 2011

Congratulations! The work you and your fellow students have completed over the past year is remarkable.

[Gratulacje! Praca wykonana przez Was oraz Wasze koleżanki i kolegów w ciągu ostatniego roku jest naprawdę imponująca.]

Your projects celebrate important elements of Poland's history and heritage that are too often overlooked.

[Wasze projekty dotyczą ważnych elementów historii i dziedzictwa Polski które zbyt często są pomijane.]

As members of Poland's diverse multicultural society, Jews made vital and lasting contributions to the

development of the humanities, arts,
and sciences.

The legacy of Jewish writers,
poets, architects, industrialists,
musicians, philosophers, and even
athletes had a profound and lasting
effect on Polish history, political life,
and culture.

In small towns and villages,
Jewish artisans and merchants also

made important contributions to their communities and civil society.

By studying the history of Polish Jews in your towns and neighborhoods, you restore Jewish memory. In the process, you help to show the true richness and diversity of Poland's heritage.

Your work is not just important for Poles. It is also important for

millions of Americans with Polish-Jewish heritage, including students your own age. Many of them have heard stories from their grandparents and great-grandparents about life in Poland before the War.

While the tragedy of World War II makes those memories bittersweet, Polish Jews who came to the United States tend to remember their pre-War

lives in Poland with fondness and nostalgia.

Just like members of the Polish community in Chicago and elsewhere, descendants of Polish Jews are proud of their heritage and hope to learn more about where they came from.

I hope that they will benefit from your research and that your efforts will help to strengthen what we diplomats call people-to-people ties. Connections

between ordinary people make the Polish-American alliance stronger and more meaningful.

By promoting greater awareness and understanding of Poland's Jewish heritage, you challenge harmful stereotypes and break down artificial barriers that have led to misunderstandings.

Your work is important because it promotes mutual respect and tolerance

– essential elements of Poland’s multicultural heritage and Poles’ reputation throughout history as champions of freedom.

In his meeting with Polish democracy activists in Warsaw three weeks ago, President Obama recalled how he and other Americans had been inspired by brave Poles who fought with determination during the Cold War to regain their freedom.

And he applauded Poland for embracing the responsibility that comes with that freedom – by working abroad to share the blessings of liberty with others, and at home to uphold the values of mutual respect and tolerance.

It is a great privilege to be here today to recognize your efforts and to have the chance to express my deep gratitude.

But your good work should not end here. I urge you to continue to challenge stereotypes and ignorance and to promote dialogue and tolerance.

Based on what I have heard and seen today, I am confident you will succeed.

Gratulacje, i dziękuję!